BERN DIBNER. *Oersted and the Discovery of Electromagnetism*. 47 pp., plates, figs., bibl. Norwalk, Conn.: Burndy Library, 1961.

The title of this volume is a *bit* misleading. It is not so much an essay on Oersted as a short history of the discovery of electromagnetism and its early applications. To be sure, the course of Oersted's life is sketched in but the primary focus is upon the most momentous of his discoveries. His other work on Chladni figures and the compressibility of water, work deemed of sufficient importance to figure in the lovely portrait which serves as the Frontispiece, is only briefly mentioned. Oersted's philosophical orientation, too, is rather quickly disposed of. That Oersted was a *Naturphilosophe*; that his assumptions about the unity of all

forces upon which his discovery was based was drawn from *Naturphilosophie*; and that his work, *The Soul in Nature,* was steeped in the *Naturphilosophe* tradition is only hinted at. Yet, without this philosophical dimension Oersted's achievement seems almost fortuitous. Professor Robert Stauffer has long since disposed of the myth that the discovery of electromagnetism was a happy accident resulting from Oersted's lack of manipulative ability (as reported by Christian Hansteen in his famous letter to Faraday). Dibner follows Stauffer in this but without some discussion of the origins of Oersted's deep faith in the unity of force in *Naturphilosophie* it is difficult to understand how he was led to his great and epoch-making discovery.

With these reservations in mind, the volume may be praised highly. Here is an excellent and straightforward account of the discovery of electromagnetism. Oersted's original memoir is reproduced in its Latin form with the English translation of Thomas Thomson. The rival claims of Romagnosi and Monon to the honor of the discovery are examined and (rightly) dismissed. The history of electromagnetism, from Ampère's work on electrodynamics through Faraday's discovery of electromagnetic induction is briefly and accurately recounted. The practical applications of Oersted's finding in the electromagnet and electric telegraphy are ably discussed.

As with all the productions of the Burndy Library, the volume is handsomely produced and profusely illustrated. The bibliography will be of use to anyone interested in the history of electricity in general and H. C. Oersted in particular. All students of the history of science should have a copy of this useful volume on their shelves. Their debt to Mr. Dibner is only increased by his latest effort.

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